

Dear Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, ranking members Hwang, Somers and Petit and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee:

I thank those legislators who have helped to draw attention to and drafted bills to help address to address the crisis of community gun violence in Connecticut: HB-5397, SB-477 and SB-16. All have elements worthy of your consideration and deserve your support.

I am testifying in favor of the language in HB-5397, An Act Declaring Gun Violence a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Office of Gun Violence Prevention, because it incorporates five important components that should be present in whichever bill is voted out of your committee:

- It declares gun violence a public health crisis.
- It houses the solution in the Department of Public Health where it can have the greatest impact.
- It has mechanisms to include voices of those most impacted by community gun violence.
- It includes a robust data gathering and research capacity to drive evidence-informed grant-making.
- It calls for funding commensurate with the magnitude of the crisis.

There's an urgent need to take action: on average, someone in CT is murdered with a gun once every three days. More than anything else, for our state to grow and prosper, people living here must feel safe in their neighborhoods and communities. Strong gun laws help, and are necessary, but they are not enough. We need to understand, de-escalate conflict and break cycles of violence that too often involve guns. Evidence-based prevention and intervention programs aimed at individuals at high risk of perpetrating or being victims of gun violence are demonstrated to reduce shootings and killings in high-violence communities.

Please support these initiatives and let's get to the causes of Gun violence and uproot it as much as possible from our neighborhoods. States, and larger cities around the country, have established similar offices of violence prevention, with dedicated staff to administer grants to community-based organizations, coordinate violence prevention activities, support policy development, and conduct research and assessments. Some offices go farther by providing direct violence prevention services, such as violence interrupters.

You can make a difference. Thank you for your attention to my words.

Sincerely,

Vanita Bhalla
Woodbury, CT 06798